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## **Youth Dating Abuse Needs Assessment Highlights**

Youth dating abuse and sexual assault are prominent but less understood problems in the field of violence prevention. Although these forms of violence and abuse are fairly readily recognized as a substantial problem within the field of violence prevention, the dynamics, consequences, incidence and prevalence of dating abuse and sexual assault among teenagers and young adults is not well understood on the national level and even less so on the local level.

The Louisville PreVent Team was one of 11 teams chosen nationally by the PreVent Institute (a UNC Chapel Hill and CDC cooperative agreement project) to attend a 6-month leadership on violence prevention institute and to develop a violence-prevention project for their community.

The Louisville PreVent Team shares a vision of creating a community (Louisville Metro, Kentucky) that does not tolerate dating abuse and rape/sexual assault among youth and young adults between the ages of 12 and 21; one in which all sectors and members of the community feel empowered to challenge the attitudes and beliefs that condone or tolerate dating abuse and rape/sexual assault; and one in which all sectors and members of the community are offered an opportunity to engage with youth in developing models of healthy and respectful relationships.

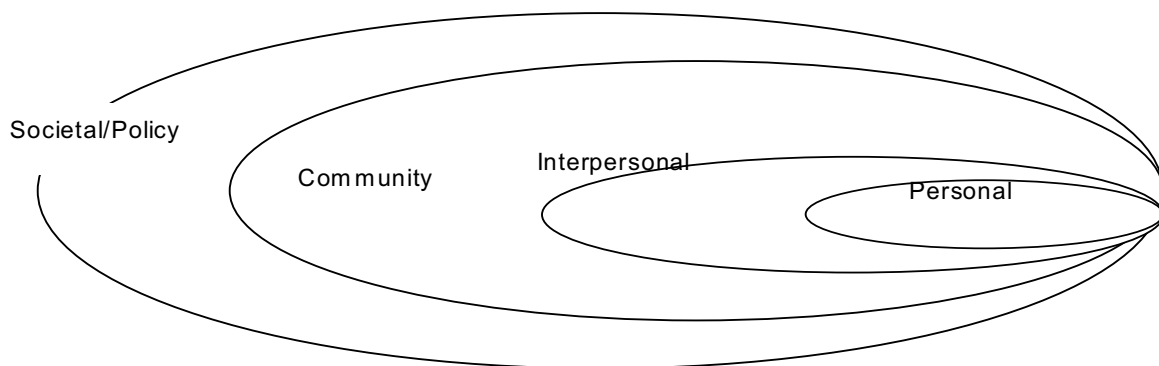
Why a needs assessment: A needs assessment will clarify what the problem is; increase our understanding of what is currently available to address youth dating abuse in terms of knowledge, resources, data, commitment, and best and promising prevention practices. This needs assessment is our planning process and it will be used strategically to achieve our stated purpose of developing and implementing a best practices, evidence-based primary prevention approach to youth dating abuse.

Goals and Objectives: We developed 11 goals with corresponding process and outcomes objectives. The following were our stated goals.

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- Goal 1:** Develop a consensus definition within the continuum of violence and abuse.
- Goal 2:** Identify existing data collection sources.
- Goal 3:** Identify and collect existing dating violence data.
- Goal 4:** Compile information on best practices for primary prevention of dating violence.
- Goal 5:** Identify and collect existing policies and legislation relevant to dating violence.
- Goal 6:** Identify and collect information on status of services in Metro Louisville.
- Goal 7:** Review, analyze, and organize collected data and information.
- Goal 8:** Identify and contact additional partners to expand the Team.
- Goal 9:** Assess the current & potential availability of human and financial resources.
- Goal 10:** Draft a report with recommendations.
- Goal 11:** Assess cultural and political readiness and will to implement the recommendations

For the purpose of this project, dating abuse is primarily considered a public health problem with implications at every level of the ecological framework.



There is further need for research and data collection in this field. Some of the absence of data can be explained by the fact that it is a young field. There is room for existing data collection mechanisms to expand or be refined to collect data on youth. Further, the existing data and research should better

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inform the types of information that needs to be collected and how it should be collected.

Team's definition: Youth Dating Abuse is a pattern of behavior, attitudes, and beliefs that seek to exert control and power over another person. The relationship is characterized by unequal status of the parties involved. Dating abuse often involves reciprocal abusive behavior, but it is the unequal status and exertion of control and power that differentiates the victim from the perpetrator. A dating relationship is defined as a person involved in an intimate or romantic association with another person, regardless of length or exclusivity of relationship. For the purpose of this definition, youth is defined as persons age 12 to 21. Tactics used in youth dating abuse include one or more of the following: Physical abuse; Verbal abuse; Threat and intimidation; Use of male privilege; Psychological abuse; Harassment; Sexual abuse, sexual assault and rape; Isolation; Excessive jealousy; Indifference; Threats of separation and reprisals; Damaging reputations; Harassment after separation; Abuse of pets; Destruction / control of property; Abuse of or threatening of children; Economic abuse or isolation; Medical/health isolation and control; Being forced into unhealthy behaviors (substance use, other risky behavior); Birth control sabotage; and Work/school sabotage.

For the purpose of our definition, rape and sexual assault are a component of youth dating abuse. This includes rape, sexual assault and sexual abuse within dating relationships but excludes rape, sexual assault and sexual abuse outside of dating relationships.

There are a handful of organizations that address youth dating abuse to varying degrees and through varying approaches.

- The Center for Women and Families
- U of L PEACC (Prevention Education and Advocacy on Campus and in the Community) Program
- Planned Parenthood of Louisville

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- Jefferson County Board of Education
- Youth Help Line
- There is also a handful of other less organized and well-defined educational programs or interventions in the community with the goal of informing and educating youth about healthy relationships and violence in relationships.

By and large, the bulk of these services are in the educational realm. There are limited resources for youth who have been abused and negligible resources for youth who are abusive.

A number of findings and recommendations have been gleaned that can be applied to the development, implementation and evaluation of a primary prevention approach to youth dating abuse in Louisville Metro. Framework for recommendations and action:

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<b>Intrapersonal</b>	<u>General:</u> Attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, self-esteem, personal experiences, biological components <u>Specific to YDA:</u> Beliefs, knowledge and attitudes about violence, gender equity, male/female roles, personal experience with interpersonal violence, gender, age, developmental stage, etc.
<b>Interpersonal</b>	<u>General:</u> Observed behaviors, self-reported behaviors, communication style <u>Specific to YDA:</u> Reported physical, sexual, verbal, psychological, emotional, social, economic abuse of/by partner; peer norms and behavior, etc.
<b>Organizational</b>	<u>General:</u> Funding, human resources, data collection, data sources, organizational/agency policies, organizational will, coordination, collaboration <u>Specific to YDA:</u> Prevention programs and services, primary prevention efforts, agencies specifically addressing YDA, agencies with programs and services addressing YDA, grants available for YDA prevention, training on YDA at organizational level, school policies and programs, etc.
<b>Community</b>	<u>General:</u> Awareness, cultural attitudes, community readiness, community will, etc. <u>Specific to YDA:</u> Awareness of youth dating abuse, what it is, impact and dynamics among youth, prevalence; attitudes about violence and abuse in intimate relationships; attitudes and beliefs about sexuality in youth; cultural views and expectations on gender roles; community interest in discussing YDA; visibility of YDA efforts; understanding and support of primary prevention versus secondary or tertiary prevention efforts; grass root community efforts in violence prevention, etc.
<b>Societal/Policy</b>	<u>General:</u> Political will, policies, laws. <u>Specific to YDA:</u> State and local laws addressing domestic violence; inclusion of minors in DV laws and mechanisms for protection; enforcement of laws; government policies as employer regarding DV; business policies regarding DV in the workplace; DV and YDA as issues discussed by politicians and lawmakers; etc.

### Thoughts on Sustainable Leadership

Working collaboratively on such a complex social issue can lead to transformational change by way of increasing knowledge, challenging long-held assumptions and modus operandi, and pulling in new partners (with the accompanying cultures, philosophies and work styles).

Personal and professional growth occur simultaneously when addressing youth dating violence as an issue on its own, while realizing that it is in part of the broader problems our (and every) community faces in terms of violence, prejudice, gender inequality, and other forms of bias.

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Effective collaboration involves optimizing everyone's skills and strengths while finding constructive ways to deal with frustrations and miscommunication.

Effective leadership needs to be a shared effort and process, with people using both formal leadership (such as authority) and informal leadership skills.

We all have a role to play in preventing violence and it is through a shared process of team building that these roles become clarified and people can choose to actualize their leadership.

A major part of leadership is challenging assumptions/preconceptions in one self and in others in a way that is non-confrontational and non-blaming.

### Policy and Legislative

Develop relationships and trust with policymakers at the local and state level.

Identify ways to reach and inform policymakers and other key players in policy and legislation to put youth dating abuse on their priority list.

Work with policymakers to inform policy development and changes that better reflect current knowledge about youth dating abuse and intimate partner violence dynamics.

Work with policymakers to refine/develop/improve protections and recourses for minors involved in abusive relationships.

- Identify and recommend ways to improve the current process for obtaining protective orders by minors without the need for adult involvement.
- Further research minors' ability to seek shelter, the availability of shelter for minors without accompanying adults, and mechanisms for improving minors' access to shelter when they are in an abusive relationship and cannot live at home.
- Further research minors' ability to seek health services, including mental health counseling and therapy services, without the consent of an adult. Look at ways to improve and increase minors' access to

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health and mental health services in dealing with an abusive situation without the need for parental consent.

Identify model policies and legislation from other states, localities and countries to assist in developing model components of legislation to protect and provide legal recourse for youth victims of abuse.

Work with local schools to develop policies that support, protect and assist youth in preventing, identifying, reporting, and managing abusive relationships.

Work with local businesses and employers to increase awareness about the impact of intimate partner violence and family violence on the workplace and inform them on the importance of having workplace violence policies.

### Infrastructure

Identify and seek funding opportunities for youth dating abuse prevention efforts and other violence prevention efforts.

Put youth dating abuse on the radar screen of major agencies and organizations working with youth in the community.

Select a point person/ hire a coordinator to administer the development of a strategic plan based on the recommendations and the findings of this report.

Develop an oversight committee (made up of the PreVent partners and others identified in this report) who will insure follow through and ongoing development of these efforts.

Need to build upon and grow the current political will and cultural readiness to address youth dating abuse and other forms of interpersonal violence by engaging key community players.

Work with partners to improve and expand the current state of data collection on youth dating abuse. For example, continue the conversation with local health department regarding the feasibility of adopting the intimate violence and sexual assault modules for the local BRFSS.

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### Community Collaboration

Develop an outreach plan to identify and engage additional partners

Explore, identify, and engage partners from community groups, including community members not affiliated with organizations or agencies

Clarify and define roles for community collaborators

Engage community collaborators in the development of a strategic plan based on this report and the recommendations

Involve universities and colleges in research, development and implementation of prevention efforts as well as partner with universities as potential evaluators of programs

Incorporate collaboration into all levels of program/intervention development and implementation

### Evidence-Based

Build upon information gathered for this report regarding best practices and promising practices in youth dating abuse prevention

Emphasize the importance of using data that has been rigorously evaluated

Use approaches that are evidence and theory based even when evaluation data is not available on the implementation of such theoretical approaches in youth dating violence (i.e. borrow from other prevention models)

Provide training modules based on evidence and current research on youth dating abuse, intimate partner abuse, family violence, and prevention to key partners and persons who work with youth

Look at local, state, national and international models

### Inclusiveness

Engage partners specifically from programs that serve GLBTQ youth, refugee and immigrant youth, and youth from other underserved backgrounds to develop specific prevention efforts targeting these youth

Create a youth advisory board that includes youth representatives from various cultural backgrounds



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Develop prevention efforts that also address the cultural realities and perspectives of the various cultural groups in the community

### Awareness and Education

Work with local youth to develop awareness and education strategies to increase awareness and understanding by youth/parents/youth service workers of youth dating abuse, its effect on youth and the community, and available resources for dealing with abuse

Work with local health providers and other youth service providers to increase their awareness of youth dating abuse, its effect on youth, and existing recourses and resources for youth in our community

Work with policymakers and other key community makers to increase their awareness and understanding of youth dating abuse

Educate youth, government officials, parents, and service providers about youth dating abuse and youth's legal rights in regards to youth dating abuse

A number of specific recommendations were also developed in regard to educational programming.